

Empire

THE CONRAD-DEMAREST MODEL OF EMPIRE

The Rise of Empires

The Fall of Empires

The Conrad-Demarest Model in Brief

APPLYING THE CONRAD-DEMAREST MODEL

SUGGESTED READINGS

All thys were of hys anpyre.

—ROBERT OF GLOUCESTER

In this first known written usage of “empire” in English, Robert used the term in 1297 to indicate an extensive territory made up of formerly independent states. The word also carried the connotation of supreme power, reflecting its genesis in *imperare*, the Latin verb meaning “to command.”

Our modern usage of “empire” is similar to Robert’s: a state that controls a large area, incorporating into itself previously independent societies that view themselves as culturally different from the controlling society. Stated differently, an empire is a politically unified state in which one people dominates its neighbors. This domination usually is by military force, but a number of other means of control can come into play, including religion, diplomacy, and trade. **Imperial** simply refers to an empire. The core idea of empire—the domination and political control of its neighbors by a single state—has occurred to would-be emperors in many places and times around the world.

Why do empires develop in some places and not in others? What are the consequences for states that become imperial? Why do empires eventually crumble? This chapter presents a model that tries to answer these questions. In thinking about this model, remember that models are not necessarily “true” in every detail but that they are interpretations created by scholars. Models serve

as simplified versions of reality, helping us see a general pattern. The details that don't fit the model can help us refine it for future use, pointing out shortcomings and additional factors of importance.

THE CONRAD-DEMAREST MODEL OF EMPIRE

In an attempt to understand better the development and fall of empires, Geoffrey Conrad and Arthur Demarest recently have produced a model. Both Conrad and Demarest are specialists in Latin American civilizations, and their examples and inspiration came primarily from the last of the major pre-Columbian American civilizations, the Aztec of Mexico and the Inca of Peru. Nonetheless, their model is designed to apply to empires in all places and all times.

The Rise of Empires

Many earlier models of the imperial process proposed a single cause for the development of empires; greedy leaders, stressful environmental circumstances, and population pressure have been common suggestions. The Conrad-Demarest model takes a different approach. Rather than claiming that all empires developed in response to the same singular condition, Conrad and Demarest argue that empires arose out of many causes, working together and intimately linked with one another. They draw a distinction between the preconditions of empire (conditions that are necessary to support an empire but not sufficient to bring empire about) and critical causes (factors that, in the presence of the preconditions, will spark the development of empire). The preconditions are factors that might permit or encourage the development of empire as an effective solution to societal problems, but not every society that is characterized by these preconditions will develop an empire. The critical causes, according to the model, are those that actually bring about empire and are distinctive to the few societies that become imperial.

As Conrad and Demarest see it, the primary preconditions of empire are six: high agricultural potential, an environmental mosaic, state-level

government, several states with none clearly dominant, mutual antagonism among those states, and adequate military resources.

Environmental factors, according to the Conrad-Demarest model, are preconditions. Good agricultural potential, for example, is critical, because an expansionistic society without good land probably will be unable to support the initial conquests necessary to begin building an empire. In addition, a region with a mosaic of different environmental zones will be more conducive to the birth of empire than one with more or less even resource distribution. Each zone in an environmental mosaic has distinctive resources and potentials, and they are wedged in among one another. A society whose control extends over only one of these zones must trade with its neighbors or in some similar manner obtain the materials that come from other zones. The empire, on the other hand, gains great advantage by controlling many of those zones, reducing dependence on trade, increasing self-sufficiency, and increasing the ability to weather a bad year when some (but not all) of the zones have limited production of food or other necessities. In pre-Columbian Mexico, for example, major empires developed in the central highlands, where there is a marked environmental mosaic; in the eastern lowlands, where the environment is more uniform, successful empires never developed.

Conrad and Demarest also consider aspects of demography in relation to the development of empire. They reject the simple argument that empires develop when population becomes too great in an area and its inhabitants are forced to expand. (This argument, incidentally, often has been used as a justification for expansion by would-be conquerors, as with Adolf Hitler's doctrine of *lebensraum* ["living space"] during World War II.) Instead, Conrad and Demarest argue that population levels typically are manageable before the establishment of empires. Indeed, empires often institute programs designed specifically to promote population increase, often to produce soldiers to fuel the military engine that runs the state. The Aztecs, for example, actively encouraged women to have large families, and women who died in childbirth were promised deification as *mociuaquetzque*¹ goddesses and an afterlife in the

¹ *mociuaquetzque*: moh see yoo KEHTZ kay

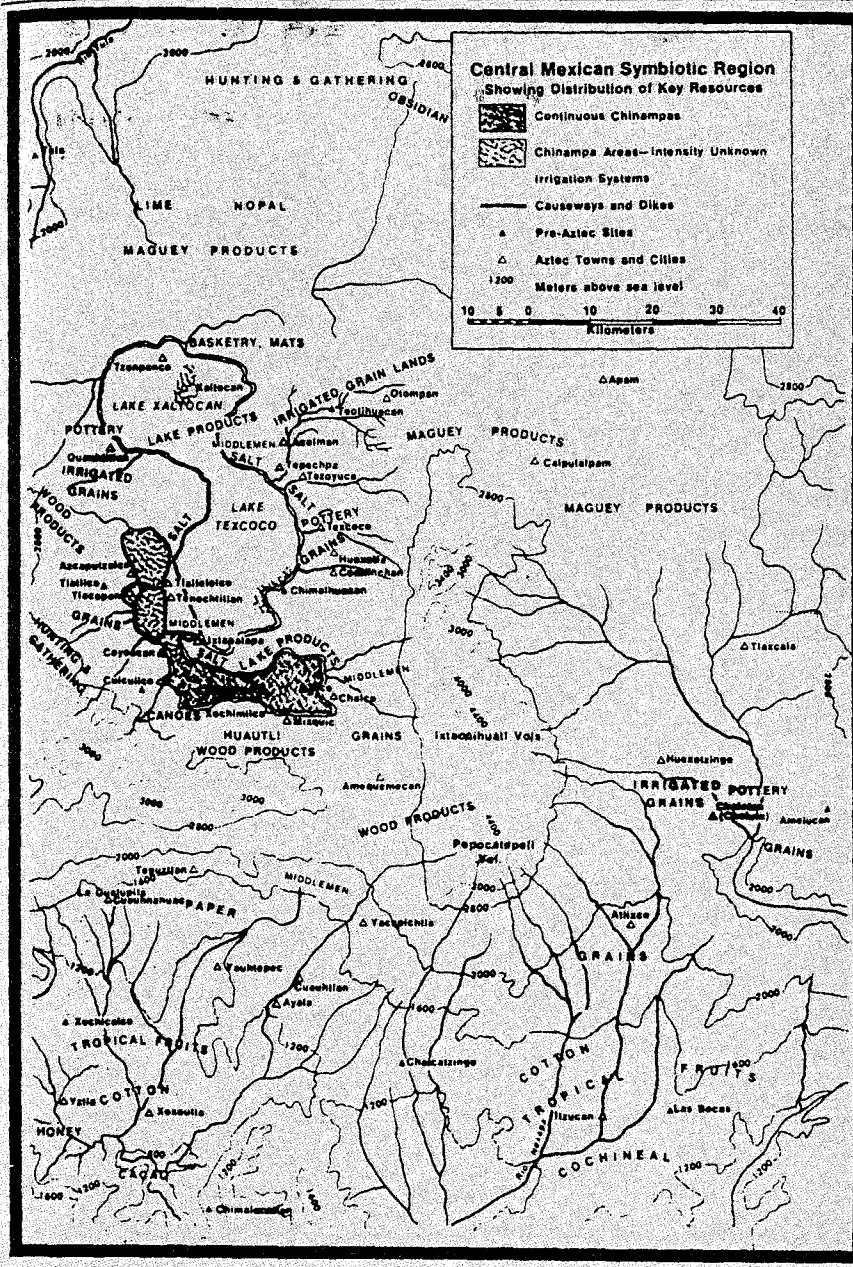


FIGURE I.2.1 Central Mexican Environmental Mosaic. Central Mexico, the heartland of the Aztec Empire, was composed of various environmental zones, each with different resources and potentials. By controlling several such zones, the Aztec rulers enhanced the developing empire's wealth and access to vital resources. From Geoffrey W. Conrad and Arthur A. Demarest, *Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Expansionism* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1984. Reproduced with permission.

supreme heaven normally reserved for warriors who died in battle. Indeed, mothers were perceived as special warriors in the struggles for empire. Ironically, gross overpopulation appears to be a result of empire, not a cause.

The Conrad-Demarest model also considers economic motivation as a precondition to the development of empire. Once a state is successful at conquest, booty or tribute will follow, and those

can be very major contributions to that state's economy. The leaders, of course, receive the bulk of this windfall, but wise rulers will redistribute some of this wealth to others immediately below them in the hierarchy, who in turn will distribute some of it to those below them, and so forth. This redistribution can be in the form of rewards for meritorious service, outright gifts, public works, or tax rebates. The redistribution of wealth helps



FIGURE 1.2.2 Death of an Aztec Woman. This Aztec drawing shows a woman who has died in childbirth and become a *mociuaquetzque* goddess. Her body is locked up and protected for four days by her family to prevent the removal of body parts for use as charms to give warriors courage in battle. A link between childbirth and warfare is also seen in the belief that spirits of women who died in childbirth shared the heaven otherwise reserved for warriors killed in battle. Detail from the *Codex Florentino*. Courtesy of Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence.

involve everyone, regardless of rank, in the fruits of conquest and empire, assuring continued political support. And, because the wealth trickles down through the established hierarchy, it helps reinforce the system of social and political ranking.

Conrad and Demarest also argue that the absence of a dominating competing state is a precondition to the rise of empire. Such a strong state would be in a position to quash the aspirations (and the soldiers) of a small state that was seeking empire, and it would be in its best interest to do so. The power vacuum that Conrad and Demarest see as critical to the nurturing of a fledgling imperial power ensures that a state with imperial intentions can develop without interference from a superior military power.

Finally, out of this antagonistic jockeying for power a successful imperial power must develop considerable military might. This could be based on large armies, superior equipment (including new weapons, such as iron spears or jet fighters), sophisticated strategy, or improved organization. A combination of these factors would be most effective.

The model has accumulated a substantial number of preconditions, many of which seem important. Why are they only preconditions? Because one can find plenty of examples of soci-

eties that met all of these preconditions and yet never developed empires, including Shang China, Old Kingdom Egypt, and the Greek poleis. This has led Conrad and Demarest to consider these preconditions as necessary but not sufficient to support empire building. They wanted to isolate the spark that lights the fires of empire and conquest, and they believe it to be ideology.

Ideology, as used in this model, refers to that complex of ideas and philosophy that directs one's goals, expectations, and actions. It can include religion, but it also can be secularly based, as with a political theory like communism. The ideology that will make a state successful at the empire business, according to Conrad and Demarest, will focus on glorifying the military and fostering the individual's feeling of identification with the state.

The ideology of some preimperial states, no doubt, is more attuned to these factors than others, but the Conrad-Demarest model suggests that a nascent imperial power can rework its ideology to emphasize these features. The Aztecs, for instance, elevated one god in their pantheon to the status of the most important: Huitzilopochtli,² the god of war. The cult of Huitzilopochtli glorified warriors, encouraging young nobles to participate

²Huitzilopochtli: hweet zee loh POHCH tlee

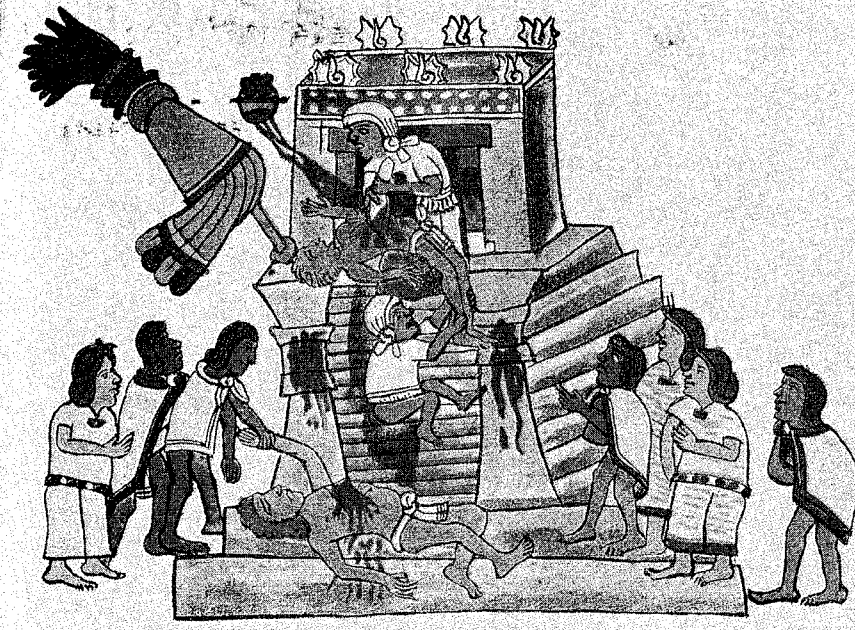


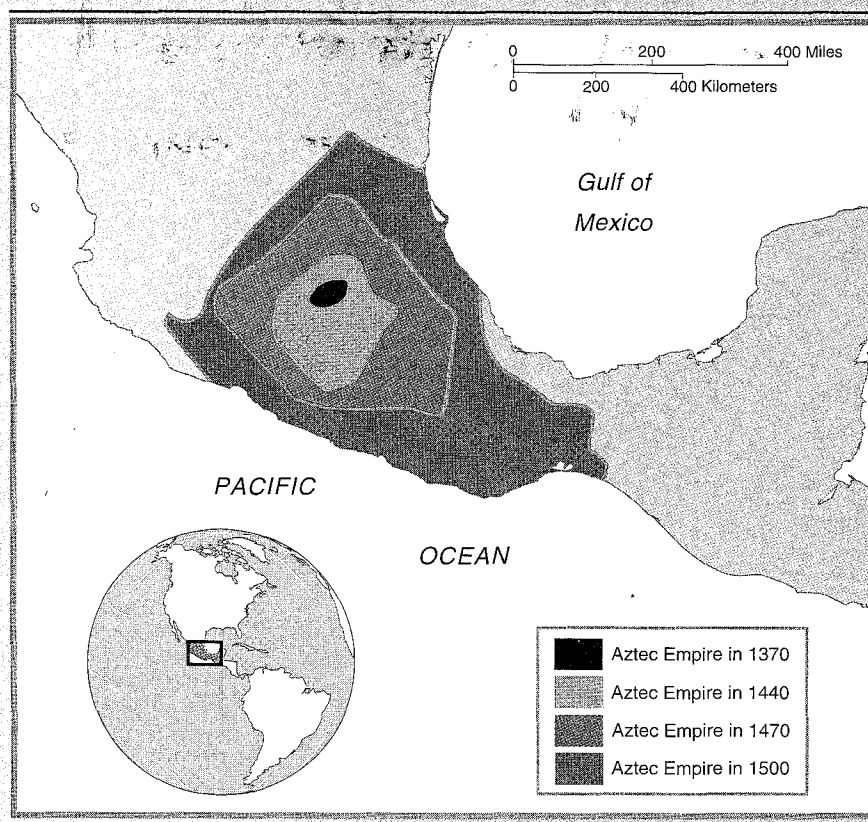
FIGURE 1.2.3 Human Sacrifice to Huitzilopochtli. This reproduction of an Aztec drawing shows a priest, at the top of the temple stairs, grasping and tearing out the heart of a person whose chest has been slashed open. At the base of the stairs, relatives collect the body of an earlier sacrifice whose remains have been hurled down the stairs. These sacrifices were to Huitzilopochtli, the war god, to ensure continued imperial success in battle. Being sacrificed was a great honor, often actively sought by Aztecs. British Museum/Fotomas Index.

in the winning of empire. The Aztecs also expanded the existing institution of human sacrifice, bringing it to a scale previously unknown. The world would cease to exist if the sacrifices were not made in sufficient numbers, and the major way to procure sacrificial victims was through warfare; therefore, warfare, the fulcrum of Aztec empire building, was necessary as an ongoing institution. The Aztec people were inundated with propaganda, a technique in use by many societies, both ancient and modern, urging them to do their share in the noble cause of the furtherance of the empire. In short, by manipulating ideologies, the leaders of the successful Aztec imperial state produced a population that felt a duty and a desire to support the drive for empire.

According to the Conrad-Demarest model, therefore, many small states may have the preconditions of empire. They may have good agricultural land that is part of a larger environmental mosaic; they may covet the wealth of their neighbors; there may be a power vacuum that has created a panoply of antagonistic, belligerent states; and they may have considerable military power. But all this will not be enough if a state's ideology does not endorse and justify warfare and expansion. Many states might profit from an empire, but few are able effectively to establish it.

The Conrad-Demarest model is attractive in its ability to integrate several factors into an explanation of the rise of empires. Unlike explanations based on simple assertions—for instance, that a state's leaders were greedy or that the military establishment was strong—the Conrad-Demarest model, although it does not quarrel with those assertions, goes further. It tries to explain why some states that had greedy rulers and strong armies became the seats of great empires, while others were absorbed into someone else's empire.

There are, however, limitations to the Conrad-Demarest model. Although it recognizes the importance of environmental differences in resource endowment, other models place the role of trade more centrally. Further, probably because their model was inspired by American examples, Conrad and Demarest do not consider certain factors that were important in Eurasia and Africa but not in the Americas. Particularly, they do not consider the development of superior iron weaponry and subsequent domination of neighbors by one people, such as the example of the Hittites and Assyrians. Nor do they address **pastoralism** (specialized livestock herding) and its implications for some Eurasian and African empires, such as the Mongol and Songhai.



MAP 1.2.1 Growth of the Aztec Empire. The Aztec Empire expanded rapidly through conquest, threat, and diplomacy. From 1440 onward, the size of the empire approximately doubled every generation. Such rapid growth is predicted by the Conrad-Demarest model of empire formation, but it is unsustainable for long periods.

The Fall of Empires

If the factors discussed earlier produce empires, what do Conrad and Demarest believe causes the downfall of empires? Exactly the same factors. As they see it, the ideological and other conditions that are necessary for the establishment of an effective empire will eventually consume that empire.

An ideology that supports warfare and conquest will drive an imperial power farther and farther from its homeland and central power base. The need for captives to sacrifice, for heathens to convert, or for peoples to dominate persists long after the empire has expanded to a point where further conquest is economically counterproductive. As imperial armies travel farther from home, they face a host of difficulties: unfamiliar terrain (where conventional tactics might be ineffective), long and fragile supply lines, difficulties of reinforcement, and communication problems. Distant states that are incorporated into the empire become especially difficult to govern, because dis-

tance from the imperial heartland increases the costs and problems of controlling local rulers. As the cost of conquest goes up, the profits often go down: The richest states near home already have been conquered, and states farther removed may be less wealthy. In addition, the difficulties of transporting booty back to the capital become overwhelming. Alexander's Greek empire presents a classic example of expansion beyond the point of practicality. In such a case the pragmatic reasons for conquest are gone, but the ideology that demands it remains.

In the meantime, other aspects of imperial expansion also are souring. State-supported efforts to increase population, if successful, now may be creating a real problem. Just at a time when more effort is needed to increase production of food and other necessities in order to support the domestic front, warfare becomes more expensive, draining resources. If this situation continues, domestic shortages might erode faith in the ideology, which in turn might lead to class or regional conflicts, perhaps even to revolt.

The only hope for the survival of the empire, according to the Conrad-Demarest model, lies in an ideological change. The ideology that underlies empire building, once the erosion of faith begins, must be modified so that continued expansion is unnecessary. A less militaristic, less aggressive ideology might allow the empire to redirect its energies toward domestic problems. The establishment of such a new ideology, however, would be no easy matter, especially given that subject states would notice the change and might interpret it as weakness, perhaps staging uprisings at inopportune moments. According to this analysis, empires are inherently unstable, a conclusion supported by their generally short duration.

The Conrad-Demarest Model in Brief

Models are simplifications, and they can be summarized as a few principles. The Conrad-Demarest model can be reduced to the following principles:

1. Necessary preconditions for the rise of empire are:
 - a. state-level government;
 - b. high agricultural potential of the environment;
 - c. an environmental mosaic;
 - d. several small states with no clearly dominant state (a "power vacuum");
 - e. mutual antagonism among those states; and
 - f. adequate military resources.
2. The primary reason a state succeeds in empire building is an ideology supporting personal identification with the state, empire, conquest, and militarism.
3. The major results of empire are:
 - a. economic rewards, reaped especially in the early years and redistributed to the elite and often to all levels of the citizenry; and
 - b. population increase, often supported by the government and its ideology.
4. Empires fall because:
 - a. the ideology of expansion and conquest fuels attempts at conquest beyond practical limits;
 - b. failure to continue conquest indefinitely and to continue to bring its economic fruits home erodes faith in the ideology that supports the empire; and
 - c. rebellions topple the empire.

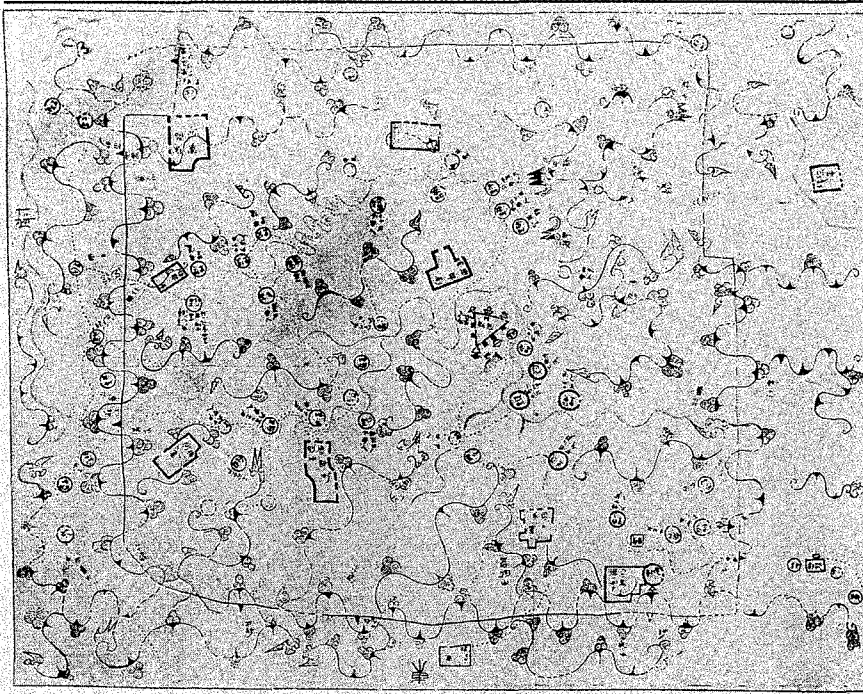


FIGURE 1.2.4 Han Chinese Map. This second century B.C. map, one of the earliest surviving from China, shows mountains (circles), rivers (wiggly lines), and military defenses (angular boxes). Chinese maps of this period may have been devoted exclusively to military functions, since contemporary documents mention them only in that context. Wen-wu, Beijing.

APPLYING THE CONRAD-DEMAREST MODEL

As with most models, the Conrad-Demarest model sounds appealing when presented in the abstract or when applied to a case that was used as inspiration for the model. The examples presented here are mostly from the Aztecs, and they support the model. The real test, of course, is whether the model can help us understand a new case.

The Qin and Han empires, as discussed in Chapter 11, unified central China for the first time. Out of the power vacuum produced by centuries of turmoil and disunity during the Warring States Period, the Qin state and its successor, the Han state, emerged as powers that could forge an empire by conquering previously independent states. The two empires formed a continuum sometimes called the Qin-Han Empire, which will be examined here in light of the Conrad-Demarest model.

The core states of the Qin-Han Empire possessed all the necessary preconditions suggested by the Conrad-Demarest model. The preimperial Qin state was in a region of great agricultural potential, yet the environmental mosaic of China left it lacking resources found in neighboring regions. The Warring States Period established a series of mutually antagonistic states, several of which had considerable military power yet none of which was clearly dominant. With these preconditions met, the spark necessary to ignite imperial expansion, according to Conrad and Demarest's model, was ideology.

During the short-lived Qin Empire and the early years of the Han Empire, emperors predominantly followed Legalist philosophy, advocating militarism, conquest, and unification. The emperor whose warriors carved out much of the early Han Empire by conquest was not nicknamed "the Martial Emperor" because of pacifist inclinations. This ideology glorifying the military fits well with the predictions of the model.

The Qin-Han Empire reacted to imperial success much as predicted by the Conrad-Demarest model. This empire took advantage of its control of various zones in the environmental mosaic through the **ever-normal granary system**, a system whereby the government collected grain from

all over the empire into warehouses and redistributed it to the people as it was required. This system pooled the produce of various regions, creating a more or less constant total supply, regardless of the agricultural success of any zone in the mosaic.

The emperor received massive material benefit in tribute, spoils of war, and commerce, once the sources for goods were controlled. The emperor then distributed some portion of that wealth. Much of that redistribution was directed through the official hierarchy, from the emperor through officials and eventually to the people. Public works, for example, normally were announced to the people by local officials, who took care to be sure it was clear that the emperor ultimately was the source of this munificence. There also were general gifts to the people on special occasions, such as the reaching of adulthood for a royal heir; these gifts usually consisted of wine, meat, or (more rarely) money. All these gifts, as well as the more ostentatious rewards reserved for top advisors and officials, helped cement the Han people together with the emperor in whatever endeavors he undertook.

Although Legalist philosophy was dominant at the Qin-Han court during the period of initial expansion of the empire, Confucianism gradually arose as a competitor. There was a period when the two vied for the emperor's support, but Confucianism eventually became the dominant philosophy of the Han Empire.

Confucian philosophy, in Han hands, evolved in a manner that elevated the emperor. Han scholars, such as Dong Zhongshu, extended Confucian thought to incorporate the concept of emperor (a notion invented in China centuries after Confucius's death). Dong developed the formula that was to characterize the Han version of Confucian political philosophy: "to subject the people to the emperor, and the emperor to heaven." This fit nicely with the Han conception of the emperor as the "son of Heaven," an official title: As a divine-right ruler, his will was inspired, perhaps informed, by the gods. The only sensible course for a devout mortal was total obedience to the emperor.

The Legalist philosophy of the Qin Empire is exactly the militaristic type of ideology that the Conrad-Demarest model predicts for the rise of empire. Elements of that philosophy were domi-

nant during the period of greatest expansion of the early Han Empire. After that, the Confucian philosophy, although not militaristic, provided a different kind of ideological underpinning for the empire. Confucians stressed ritual and persuasion over might to maintain imperial rule; they often spoke out against expansionist military campaigns. A glorification of militarism was unnecessary in the later Han Empire, because the glorification of the emperor superseded it: If the emperor decreed military action, it was, by definition, the will of the gods and therefore appropriate.

In short, the Qin-Han Empire fits Conrad and Demarest's suggestion that a long-lived empire will modify its ideology to reduce dependence on militarism. The Qin Empire failed to make an ideological transition and fell within fourteen years. The

Han Empire successfully made the transition to an appropriate ideology and lasted four centuries.

Has the Conrad-Demarest model improved our understanding of the Qin-Han Empire? Certainly it has drawn attention to factors that probably were important in the formation and functioning of the empire. It has helped us see how diverse practices, such as the ever-normal granary system, fit into the imperial system. Finally, it has drawn attention to a potentially significant factor for future research: the role of imperial government in Qin-Han population increase. The frustratingly fragmentary evidence could be seen as supporting a state-sponsored population increase, but more research will be necessary in order for us to see whether that conclusion is justified.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Carneiro, Robert L. "Political Expansion as an Expression of the Principle of Competitive Exclusion." In Robert Cohen and Elman R. Service, eds. *Origins of the State: The Anthropology of Political Evolution*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978, pp. 205-23. Presents an alternative model for the develop-

ment of empires, based on ecological and economic factors.

Conrad, Geoffrey W., and Arthur A. Demarest. *Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Expansionism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984. The book-length origin of the model discussed here.

Empire: First used in English in 1297 to indicate an extensive territory made up of formerly independent states. A further refinement might be to add that an **empire** is a politically unified state in which one people dominates its neighbors.

The Conrad-Demarest Model of Empire: Basic Principles

1. Necessary preconditions for the rise of empires are:
 - a. State-level government
 - b. High agricultural potential in the area
 - c. An environmental mosaic
 - d. Several small states with no clearly dominant state (power vacuum)
 - e. Mutual antagonisms among those states
 - f. Adequate military resources
2. The primary reason a state succeeds in empire building is an ideology supporting personal identification with the state, empire, conquest and militarism
3. The major rewards of empire are:
 - a. Economic rewards, reaped especially in the early years and redistributed to the elite and often to all levels of the citizenry
 - b. Population increase, often supported by the government and its ideology
4. Empires fall because:
 - a. the ideology of expansion and conquest fuels attempts at conquest beyond practical limits
 - b. failure to continue conquest indefinitely and to continue to bring home its economic fruits erodes faith in the ideology that supports the empire
 - c. revolutions topple the empire

Find Specific examples of each of the above indicators in the Han and Roman Empires

Han Empire

Roman Empire

1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

Apply the Conrad-Demetrest model to the Islamic empire

Islamic Empire

1.a
b.
c.
d.
e.
f.
2.
3.a.
b.
4.a.
b.
c.

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WORLD HISTORY

SECTION II

Part B

(Suggested planning and writing time—40 minutes)

Percent of Section II score—33 1/3

Directions: You are to answer the following question. You should spend 5 minutes organizing or outlining your essay.

Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with appropriate historical evidence.
- Addresses all parts of the question.
- Uses world historical context to show change over time and/or continuities.
- Analyzes the process of change over time and/or continuity.

2. Analyze the cultural and political changes and continuities in ONE of the following civilizations during the last centuries of the classical era.

Chinese, 100 C.E. to 600 C.E.

Roman, 100 C.E. to 600 C.E.

Indian, 300 C.E. to 600 C.E.

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Part C

(Suggested planning and writing time—40 minutes)

Percent of Section II score—33 1/3

Directions: You are to answer the following question. You should spend 5 minutes organizing or outlining your essay.

Write an essay that:

- Has a relevant thesis and supports that thesis with appropriate historical evidence.
- Addresses all parts of the question.
- Makes direct, relevant comparisons.
- Analyzes relevant reasons for similarities and differences.

3. Within the period from 1450 to 1800, compare the processes (e.g., political, social, economic) of empire building in the Spanish Empire with the empire-building processes in ONE of the following.

The Ottoman Empire

OR

The Russian Empire

STOP

END OF EXAM

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